Populism in Power: A Comparative Literature Review of Populist Policymaking Across Regions and Policy Domains

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Abstract: This comparative literature review examines how populist policymaking has been conceptualised and studied across diverse political, regional, and policy contexts. Drawing on key theoretical frameworks, the review maps major scholarly debates on how populist leaders shape and implement policy once in power. Using a PRISMA-based systematic methodology, it synthesises findings from peer-reviewed studies covering economic, welfare, immigration, and law-and-order policies in Europe, Latin America, the United States, and Asia. The analysis highlights variations between left-wing and right-wing populist governments, differences in policy outcomes, and the methodological divides between qualitative case studies and quantitative analyses. While evidence suggests populist policymaking often prioritises short-term responsiveness and symbolic gestures over institutional sustainability, significant gaps remain regarding long-term policy impacts, bureaucratic interactions, and comparative institutional constraints. The review concludes by outlining future research directions that aim to integrate cross-regional insights and enhance empirical measures of populist governance.